

FEB 1985

white-sand natural swimming patch made even more startling by its location a mile off the island's shores.

If you're willing to creep around in the underbrush, take a side trip to Bird of Paradise Island, and you may sight some of the rare birds for which the island is named. But if it's exotic birds *and* tranquility you're after, consider Asa Wright Nature Centre, an hour and a half's drive from Port of Spain. A former plantation, the estate now welcomes bird-watchers in a secluded sanctuary whose innocence seems preserved under a bell jar. Tourists can intrude for an afternoon, but only serious birders can stay. We watched one sitting behind his camera in front of a sugar-water feeder in patient hope of stilling, for print, a hummingbird's wings.

One of my favorite meals in Trinidad was the simple Creole lunch at Asa Wright, the star of which was christophene, a vegetable resembling a wrinkled avocado and tasting like high-test zucchini. Hotel food is quite a bit better than respectable (e.g., the Hilton's seafood buffet, the Polynesian/Chinese menu at the Kapok down the road), but more interesting are the curries at Mangal's Indian Restaurant in a Victorian mansion off the Savannah or even the hurry-curry takeout called *roti*—pita-like pockets stuffed with potato plus chunks of beef, chicken, shrimp, or goat—that is sold at stands along most roads.

The food that pleased me most in Trinidad was definitely "native." Best of all was the picnic on Tobago's Pigeon Point beach catered by the nearby Crown Reef Hotel: peas and rice, macaroni pie cooked to a crunch on top, softly spicy stewed chicken cooled by a cucumber salad, and curried crab in the shell that we gnawed and sucked and consumed in frightening quantity. There was also *callaloo*—crab meat, okra, and a spinach-like green called dasheen mixed up into a dense dark muck that tasted. . . sublime.

The Friday night before Carnival, I think it was, appearances by the king and queen semi-finalists were spelled by Trinidad's top Calypso singers. One was Lord Nelson. Bald, bellied, and sexy in a tight white jumpsuit, he sang his hit "Let's Have a Good Time!" He certainly was. . . and I certainly did. ▽

ERNESTO BAZAN

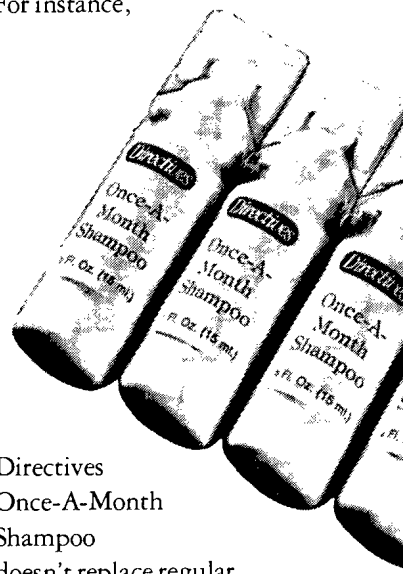


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travel

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Mediterranean cruise By Maggie Paley

As I stepped somewhat wearily out of the steamy Piraeus afternoon and onto Mediterranean Deck of the *Royal Viking Sea*, the assistant cruise director, a smiling man, greeted me as if I were an old friend. Air-conditioning soothed my tired eyes. I had flown into Athens from New York only three hours earlier and spent the afternoon on the Acropolis in a broiling October sun. I was exhausted. Now, a man in uniform took me into an elevator and led me to my double stateroom where my bags and a basket of fruit were waiting. I felt as if, from now on, I wouldn't have to worry about anything. I had had my first lesson in being a cruise passenger—an experience that teaches you how to surrender to the pleasures of being served.

On the Royal Viking Line's Holy Land/Mediterranean cruise, in one thirteen-day period, I would get a taste of Egypt, Israel, Turkey, Mykonos, Crete, Yugoslavia, and Venice, and these ports would be as jewels in a necklace—essential, but subordinate to the work as a whole. The process of getting there would turn out to be far more impor-

Luxury at sea: 650-passenger "Royal Viking Sea," right; star sight on land, Egypt's great Sphinx, below, at Giza near Cairo



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MEDITERRANEAN CRUISE

(Continued from page 276)

Even on shore excursions, you feel like a VIP. As we walked off the gangplank in Alexandria, Egypt, we were greeted by a uniformed brass band, whisked through customs. As we traveled from Alexandria to Cairo aboard our private, air-conditioned tour bus, a knowledgeable guide prepped us on his

country's history, manners, religions, and archaeology.

Through the streets of the towns we passed, washing hung out of windows; men—some in caftans, others in Western dress—conferred dramatically; shopkeepers sat disconsolately in front of shelves full of bright packages, waiting for customers. In Cairo, modern hotels edged both sides of the Nile. Car horns honked. A layer of pale brown desert dust covered everything. We saw the pyramids and the Sphinx, rode camels, and stayed overnight in the very sleek Ramses Hilton, overlooking the Nile. It was all a dream. And a wonderfully well organized one at that.

It was also thrilling: Egypt's culture seemed as exotic as the sinuous Arabic writing that flashed in neon from the tops of tall buildings at night. I had worried in advance about the idea of being part of a tour group, and in fact I would have spent more time in the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities than our guide permitted us. On the other hand, I was

Temple of Hadrian at Ephesus, on the Turkish coast

ship to return to was an absolute joy.

"We're here to give you anything you want," said David, one of the waiters at our table, that first night back aboard the *Royal*

Being a cruise passenger teaches you how to surrender to the pleasures of being served

glad he was there to point out the masterpieces and to answer questions. It was clear that a guide was an advantage in a country where it would have been difficult to get around by myself. And then, after two days of constant heat and hubbub, having a gleaming white

Viking Sea after our Egyptian adventure. I asked him for a mango for dessert. He gave me a cut mango, its pale orange flesh cross-hatched for easy scooping, accompanied by black grapes to heighten its visual appeal. Roberto, our other waiter, remembering my preference for mint tea, had it steeping before I ordered it.

After dinner, I could have danced and been entertained in all of the ship's three nightclubs. I could have seen a movie, watched tanned, beautifully dressed South Americans play blackjack in the casino, or had quiet drinks in a big low leather chair high up in the Windjammer Room. But I was feeling fortunate to be on a cruise ship in the Mediterranean, so I strolled out on the Promenade Deck instead, to see how fast the ship was going and to watch the reflection the moon made on the dark water.

The next day, in Jerusalem, we saw the Wailing Wall and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and were moved by the Biblical landscape that surrounds the city—dark sand hills ringed with white stone terraces and dotted with olive trees. In the bazaar in the Old City, there were beautiful old silk embroidered robes and silver bracelets to bargain for, as well as lambskin slippers, copper and brass souvenirs. As our bus passed by one souvenir stand, the proprietor called out to us, "Everything for nothing." Though he meant it as a come-on, he sounded as if that was what he thought Americans expected to get.

Actually, "everything for nothing" was a fair description of what ship life felt like. Food was available at almost any hour; a bar was always open somewhere. You could play cards in a card room; take books out of the library; listen to lectures by Professor Giovanni Costigan about the history of the areas we were visiting; lift weights in the gym; have a sauna; get a massage, a facial, a manicure;

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Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock mosque

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work on the ship jigsaw puzzle; swim; play shuffleboard, ring-toss, or paddle tennis; drive golf balls into a net on the Sports Deck; jog, walk, stroll, lie around in your room, lie around on deck. Perhaps because of the volume of new information you got every time you went ashore and into a new culture, the time spent aboard ship had a certain mindless quality about it.

When they weren't lazing, passengers were most likely to be acting as consumers in one form or another. Eating was the major pastime

at sea, and some of the biggest occasions on board ship had to do with food. The high point in visual gastronomy was reached at the Norwegian buffet, which was set up at lunchtime on Norwegian Day in the Oslo Lounge—the same room where on various evenings you could have heard soprano Anna Moffo sing, or William Colby, ex-head of the CIA, talk about the spy business, or ventriloquist Mark Merchant trade insults with his dummies. There were plates and plates of caviar, gravlaks, shrimp, lobster, and beef. There were ice sculptures and butter sculptures—a Viking, a Troll, swans, flying dolphins; there were breads in the shape of mice, dragonflies, steering wheels. There were pink and green and brown and yellow and red and white des-

place, one of the quickest ways to get to know the people is to wander into their shops. My purchases accumulated in my stateroom as physical evidence of the contact I'd made with many cultures in very few days.

All of the ports we visited offered both fascinating sights and seductive shops. In Turkey, for example, one morning we were guided through the ancient and astonishing Greek city of Ephesus, slowly being excavated, where the main streets were paved with marble and lined with Greek statues. That afternoon we shopped in the port city of Kusadasi for jewelry, Turkish carpets, copper, and sweaters. The next morning on the Greek island of Mykonos, with its brilliantly white-washed houses and winding cobbled streets,

Bright white street on Greek isle Mykonos



*In Venice, motorboats buzzed the ship, cruising us
 as if we were a tourist attraction*

serts, mousses and cakes and pies, cream puffs shaped like swans, and a chessboard cake with brown-and-white-chocolate Greek-statue chess pieces set on it. The chefs came out for bows.

On shore, sightseeing and, surprisingly for me, shopping were almost as tempting as were our feasts at sea. In fact, you didn't have to have taken the cruise with shopping in mind to turn into a shopper during the course of it. When you have very little time to spend in a

there were more jewelry, furs, cotton sweaters and shirts. In Herakleion, Crete, after we had toured the ruins at Knossos, we encountered more temptations to buy and take home. And still more in the charming walled city of Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia—even though, as I heard one passenger put it, "Those people didn't have much to sell."

Of all the pleasures of giving up control over your life on ship, perhaps the greatest is the most obvious— (Continued on page 281)

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